

The Voter Disenfranchisement and Restoration of Rights Exploratory Committee

Minutes of the Meeting  
January 20, 2016 at 2:00PM  
Alabama State House, Room 617  
Montgomery, Alabama

Members attending the Committee meeting included John H. Merrill, Secretary of State; State Senator Linda Coleman; State Senator Cam Ward; State Representative David Faulkner; Michael Coleman, Executive Director of Hope Inspired Ministries; Darlene Biehl, crime victim's advocate; Jeff Dunn, Commissioner of the Department of Corrections; Pastor Kenneth Glasgow, representing The Ordinary Peoples Society; Will Harrell, representing the American Civil Liberties Union; Carol Hill, member of the Shelby County Board of Registrars; Quin Hillyer, freelance journalist; Win Johnson, representing Rich Hobson, Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts; Summer Scruggs, Circuit Clerk of Clarke County; Gabrelle Simmons, representing Cliff Walker, Chairman of the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles. Also in attendance were Joel Laird, General Counsel for the Secretary of State, and Ed Packard, Director of Elections for the Secretary of State

Secretary Merrill opened the meeting by welcoming the members of the Committee and members of the public who came to observe the meeting.

Ed Packard, chair of the Subcommittee on Moral Turpitude Crimes, provided a summary of the Subcommittee's work and discussion of which felony crimes in Alabama should be defined as "moral turpitude crimes." Mr. Packard related that a majority of the members of the Subcommittee were leaning toward defining as moral turpitude felonies only those crimes currently identified in state law as requiring a full pardon from the Board of Pardons and Paroles for restoration of voting rights.

Secretary Merrill lead a discussion of a draft bill prepared by Ed Packard that would identify which felony crimes are crimes of moral turpitude and thus would lead to a loss of voting rights under the state constitution. The discussion focused on whether any of the crimes identified in the draft bill should be removed from the listing. While no crimes were removed from the listing, the Committee agreed to add the following crimes to the bill: kidnapping in the first or second degree; aggravated child abuse, and drug trafficking. The Committee approved the draft bill with these modifications by a unanimous vote of those casting a vote and with 3 abstentions.

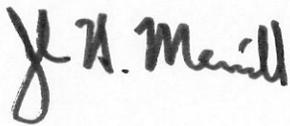
Secretary Merrill lead a discussion of a draft bill prepared by Ed Packard that would modify the requirements and procedures for having voting rights restored after a conviction for a disqualifying felony of moral turpitude. Gabrelle Simmons, representing the Board of Pardons and Paroles commented on provisions related to the Boards Executive Director and requested that those provisions allow a senior staff member or some designee of the Executive Director to assist the Executive Director. Ms. Simmons also commented on the lengthy and resource-intensive appeals process provided in the draft. The Committee agreed and requested that modifications be made to address all of Ms. Simmons concerns.

The Committee agreed that the bill should state that a person must pay all court costs, fines, fees and victim restitution prior to having one's voting rights restored. The Committee further agreed, however, that fees assessed against an offender after the original conviction in the same case should be excluded from this requirement.

The Committee agreed that the bill should include language requiring all correctional facilities post notices regarding the requirements and procedures for having one's voting rights restored after conviction for a disqualifying felony conviction.

The Committee approved the draft bill with these modifications by a unanimous vote.

With no other business to be conducted, the meeting was adjourned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J. H. Merrill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".